

DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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July 22, 2008

TO: Sandra Erickson, Board Chair  
Priscilla Halcro, HBCS Director  
Merlin Gilham, CEO

FROM: Lori Wertz, QIS

SUBJECT: Home Based Services Review--FY08

The following should serve as annual summary of your HBS programs for the FY 08 ending June 30, 2008. It is based on the onsite file review, home visits throughout this past year as well as reports and information submitted by your agency.

It continues to be a pleasure to work with QLC's HBS staff. I am continually amazed by the staff's energy, ongoing commitment and proactive approaches to services for families. The demands placed on their time as our DD system changes have been great, and yet they continue to adapt and provide an excellent level of care while functioning as a cohesive group working toward a common goal.

I would like to extend my personal appreciation to each of the staff in this department. At any point in time, any one of them has offered their assistance in getting information from families, getting information related to the billing system, coordinating with folks in the Central Office, helping with the new eligibility application process, getting estimated cost plans, MONAs and even Vinelands. Thank-you!

As always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me. In the meantime, I look forward to the privilege of working with Home Based Services this coming year.

cc: file  
DDP/Central Office

**NATIONAL ACCREDITATION REPORTS:**

Accreditation is no longer required by the State and QLC no longer uses accreditation as part of their children's services program.

**CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS:**

The agency consistently uses consumer surveys and results in 2008 are not much different than what has been noted in past years. Surveys cover a variety of questions and ask the rater to mark whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree with each of several questions covering topics such as whether services are family centered, whether the family was given information (procedural safeguards, where to call if not satisfied with services, support organizations, transitioning), the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the FSS, the helpfulness of services in meeting needs, as well as the required 'no child left behind' indicators required by federal regulation. One hundred and sixty-eight surveys were returned this year (71 Part C, 23 FES, 39 IFES, 35 Limited) representing kids currently in services (146), no longer in services (20) and (2) surveys returned blank. The comments were overwhelming positive. Families consistently site appreciation for their FSS, state that their FSS is knowledgeable and helpful, many stated that they could not survive without the help of their FSS. Negatives sited in the survey were in reference to the changes in the State respite policy, the need for more respite dollars in the system and only one comment that an FSS did not follow up with information on the child's hearing evaluation.

**FSSAC PARENT REPRESENTATIVE INPUT:**

This region did not have contact with an FSSAC parent representative this year.

**HOME VISITS/FAMILY CONTACTS:**

Home visits have occurred consistently over the past year. All service areas were represented (Part C, FES, limited and IFES) with no significant issues to report. Personal visits with families have mirrored consumer survey information. Availability of respite and hab aide providers, the State policy change for respite, and flexibility/availability of funds from fiscal year to year when needs change significantly and criterion for the new autism waiver have been some of the questions raised. There are families with regular email, phone and onsite contact with the Regional Office as well. When questions arise, they are quickly addressed and rectified through open communication.

**INTERNAL MONITORING SYSTEMS:**

This program has a thorough monitoring system in place and changes are made regularly based on the findings through that system. For example, staff FTE/positions, case loads matching families and Family Support Specialists, supervisory case loads, and staff locations are regularly reviewed and modified based on the information from internal monitoring systems, family/consumer surveys, and staff input and requests. These changes appear to be made with minimal disruption of families and take into consideration the best interests of the families and the staff involved.

HBS staff have trained investigators under the state Incident Management policy and through that system, follow State investigation and reporting policy. HBS staff have implemented the policy across all services (not just waiver) and consistently notify the Regional Office as required by policy. There was one IFES consumer death this fiscal year for a child with significant medical need. The investigation and resultant medical opinion was that the death was directly related to the child's disability and there was nothing that

could have done to prevent it. It should be noted that the role of the Family Support Specialist did not end with the child's death but that in fact, the FSS continued to be involved with the family for an appropriate amount of time through the grieving process. It should also be noted that the family clearly appreciated and needed that level of support and indicated their gratefulness for the kindness and care showed to them by agency staff. There were a couple of incidents this year that resulted in referrals to CPS where the child was under CPS monitoring authority and where there was allegation of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Again this year, the largest number of incident reported this year were hospitalizations in served homes.

#### **DOCUMENTATION OF PRAISE OR COMPLAINTS:**

No formal complaints were received by the Regional Office regarding children's services this past fiscal year. As previously noted, there were some informational questions that were deferred to the agency for resolution. Examples of these were: questions about how cost plans were formulated, questions about how dollars are used in IFES, general referral questions, etc... It is understood also that some families made complaint directly to QLC for perceived issues. These were generally related to cost plan allocations, changes in respite policy and changes in cost plans under the rates system. Additionally, concerns were raised by Family Support Specialists on behalf of families. Again, these had generally to do with respite funding, changes in respite policy, and in one case, equality of funding between parents in a divorce situation. It should be noted that all complaints to HBS are tracked across services, investigated and documented with notation of remediation. It is a pleasure to know and see that issues raised by families or other agencies are addressed in an unbiased, fair manner such that resolution is generally lasting.

Praises for the HBS program are numerous. As noted previously, families are very appreciative of the level of support and knowledge offered by the Family Support Specialists. As has been noted in past evaluations, the staff in this program are vigilant, proactive and have a sense of pride and commonality in the job they perform. They are involved in their communities as evidenced in their involvement with the Autism walk, Safe Kids, Story Maker, Positive Peers, E & D Clinics through Full Circle, as well as many other programs and support groups.

It also must be noted that ECO data, as compiled by the DDP Central Office, again this year showed high percentages of compliance. This standard of excellence has been noted in the last several evaluation cycles. Collection of this data occurs quarterly and is incredibly time consuming for staff documenting it as well as the staff compiling it. Maintaining not only the standards, but the timelines for reporting is not easy feat.

#### **LICENSING INFORMATION**

QLC has no foster placements at this time. The organization has been a child-foster licensing agency in the past. The paperwork for licensing was completed by QLC staff but as of this writing, the State department responsible for administering the current licensure has not completed its review or sent the renewal.

#### **FINANCIAL AUDITS:**

No significant issues were noted as a result of the most recent agency audit report as related to children's services. It was strongly recommended by the Audit Bureau that the

agency apportion part of building/office expenses to the children's program. This was completed by the agency Fiscal Director.

Last year the agency undertook several proactive steps to reduce costs and overhead to the agency as a result of the application of the rates system. Those included a reduction of 2.25 FTE in Family Support Specialists, elimination of 1 supervisor FTE and consolidation of office space. Additionally, the duties of an intake person (except FES/IFES) were spread across positions in order to optimize resources. Further changes are planned for FY 09. Specifically due to staff requests and the retirement of a long term FSS, some staff requested reduced hours which allowed for the hire of an FSSA, effectively added a .25 FSS position and a .75 intake FTE. Again, it was clear that the agency was responding to staff need while ensuring efficient delivery of services to families.

As mentioned in the last evaluation, one of the greatest strengths of this department is its record keeping. Each child has a data base by service provision and Individual Cost Plan, which not only creates accurate billing for the State system but doubles as a back-up data file. Each expenditure is tracked and monitored. With the many changes in the AWACS, and the resultant data glitches, the HBS Fiscal Coordinator has spent a great deal of time collaborating with DDP Central Office staff in identifying billing issues and missteps as that system evolves. Her abilities continue to benefit both QLC and the State!

#### **FSS CERTIFICATIONS:**

HBS currently has all 19 comprehensively certified Family Support Specialists. No one is in provisional status.

#### **CRISIS RESPONSE:**

HBS staff appear to have excellent working relationships with families and other agencies. Although crisis can happen to any family in any service, the most frequent presentation of need appears to occur in IFES. During this past year, staff have responded on behalf of families for a variety of crisis situations (parent needing to leave state to care for ill family member, consumer death, hospitalizations, and the need for out of home placements). HBS staff work closely as a unit and with the Regional Office when crisis presents itself and appropriately request risk pool dollars or assistance in advocating for out of home placements. For kids in IFES, the staff have been most helpful in ensuring updated referrals and eligibility documentation is in place. It is a constant balancing act to maximize family choice and system capability.

It should also be noted that the agency's internal response to crisis was evident when a family in a particularly difficult divorce situation engaged in a rather animated discussion in their child's IFSP at the agency offices. The Fiscal Director with other office staff responded in a respectful and considerate manner to ensure the safety of all parties involved. Their concern was very much appreciated.

#### **FILE REVIEW:**

Files were reviewed in accordance with the November 2003 version of Montana Evaluation Process for Family Education and Support Services. The sample included files from FES, Part C and IFES as well as children who exited Part C and those in transition to other services. Files document consistent use of multi-dimensional assessments, medical information and parental observations which determine the course of the IFSPs.

There were NO significant issues to report as a result of the file review. The one issue that did surface during review involved transition and whether families were referred for other appropriate services/agencies. Current file review appeared more cookie cutter in response ('discussed options, family will call if they have more questions'). In past file reviews, this appeared more clearly defined and delineated. This was not assigned a Quality Assurance Observation Sheet however as it was addressed at the time and with the proposed changes in FTE. In fact, it was suggested by the Director of HBS services that this should be covered in both the file/intake and the eligibility review and that the recommendations and referral could come from both sources. The attached table and Quality Assurance Observation Sheets reflect the overall findings for Home Base Services.

**OTHER INFORMATION:**

Agency policy reflects updated requirements for Part C, including ECO. Not all changes have been implemented yet as there is still some outstanding controversy at the Federal/States level with regard to some of those changes. Once final determination is received, the updates will take immediate effect.

As mentioned previously, Outreach, family support groups, training and community involvement continue to be priorities for the HBS program. To name a few activities, this program is involved in Nurturing Pathways (which was cut back due to funding issues this year), COPS Talk, Positive Peers, the continuation of therapies out of the Shelby office and providing services to Browning, Cutbank, Shelby and Conrad, involvement with the Autism Society of America and the annual Autism Walk, membership in the High Risk committee through Benefis Health Care, the Parent's Advisory Committee, Safe Kids, Story Maker, as well as many other programs and support groups. Although Full Circle is a separate contract, key QLC Family Support Specialists are involved with the E&D Clinics as well.

It is a privilege to work with this group of people. Your willingness to work together and with other agencies, your willingness to extend yourselves even when it is inconvenient or taxing your limited resources are but a couple of strengths. Thank-you for your compassion, your focus and your constant goal of providing better services to families.